

Giving to Non-Quaker Organisations

A Paper from Quaker Stewardship Committee

In what circumstances should an Area Meeting or a Local Meeting give a grant or donation to a non-Quaker charity or organisation from meeting funds? How should such giving be managed?

General Principles

Area Meeting funds, including the money held by Local Meetings, can only be spent on the Meeting's charitable purposes. These are set out in each AM's governing document and also in *Quaker Faith & Practice, 5th edition*, 14.4. Meetings are most likely to give money to a non-Quaker charity or organisation in order to: -

- strengthen the life and witness of local meetings;
- spread the message of Friends and interpret and develop the thought and practice of the Religious Society of Friends;
- undertake our service for the relief of suffering at home and abroad;
- fund the concerns of Friends that our meetings have adopted or agreed to support.

The Charity Commission and OSCR guidelines¹ state that if we fund another charity or organisation we must:

- be sure that this is in our charity's best interests. This includes checking that any money given is used as we expected it to be.
- record our decision to fund another charity in the minutes of the meeting.

There are additional, stringent rules for donations made directly to charities and organisations outside the UK.

Recording and reviewing giving to non-Quaker organisations

The advice from the Charity Commission implies that the charitable object of the charity receiving a donation or grant should be in harmony with our own. When a grant, donation or subscription is agreed for the first time, the receiving organisation, the amount and why the money is being given must be recorded in a minute. Money to fund a concern may be given to further a Yearly Meeting concern such as peace or sustainability, or an Area or Local Meeting concern. Particular care should be taken to show that there is a tested and adopted concern if the amount is large. A rough guideline is that the amount might be considered to be large if it is greater than £250, in which case the amount should be as a result of a tested concern. QFP 13.12 covers the testing of concern, and 13.14 notes that when a concern has been adopted by a Local Meeting then the Area Meeting clerk must be informed 'without delay'. Even when a non-Quaker charity has not been adopted as a concern then QFP14.04d states that funding has to be agreed, and it follows that it is thus duly minuted.

Meetings should keep their giving to non-Quaker organisations under regular review. They should be able to demonstrate that the money is being used for the purpose for which it was given, for example through reports from the recipient organisation or attendance at its

¹ extracted from the web-site: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/work-with-other-charities>

OSCR = The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator.

meetings. Repeated donations by standing order should be checked periodically to make sure that they are still relevant.

The Area Meeting trustees' annual report should identify grants and donations to non-Quaker organisations, and in the case of large ones, explain the reasons: this includes any agreed in previous years that are still being made during the year being reported. The relevant AM or trustees meeting minute should be quoted in the report.

Demonstrating due diligence

Preferential rates for room hire

Some meetings give preferential rates to local groups and charities for the hiring of rooms. It needs to be recognised that, by charging at a lower rate, we are in practice making a donation (the difference between a normal charge, and the preferential charge) to a non-Quaker organisation. In these cases such donations need to be handled in the same way as donations of money, i.e. the arrangement for a preferential room hire rate needs to be recorded in a minute, and preferably as an adopted concern. However, some flexibility in setting hire charges may be both necessary and desirable. It may sometimes be felt appropriate to charge a lower rate than normal so that a socially useful project with poor funding can use the premises when they would otherwise remain empty.

As an appendix the procedure for Six Weeks Meeting is attached: that advises against giving preferential room hire rates except in exceptional circumstances.

Subscriptions for Membership of Non-Quaker Organisations

Care needs to be taken with membership fees for non-Quaker organisations in cases where such a membership fee could be construed to be a donation.

Related party transactions

Meetings should be particularly careful to record the process of discernment and rationale for a grant, donation or below market hiring charge or subscription when the recipient is an organisation where members of the Area Meeting are involved in the running of such an organisation, or where some family member of a trustee is involved. In such cases it is essential to notify the Area Meeting trustees so that they can ensure that they meet all the requirements for reporting related party transactions.

Giving to overseas organisations

If money is given directly to an overseas organisation then Area Meeting trustees have to meet stringent requirements to show that they have taken active steps to ensure that the money is spent only for the purpose for which it was given. This is an onerous task and so Meetings should give to a UK-based charity that will take on this responsibility for money sent abroad wherever possible. If a meeting does wish to send money direct it should read the relevant Charity Commission or OSCR guidance and consult AM trustees before any decision on the grant or donation is made.

An Alternative Way of Making Donations

Many Meetings hold 'special collections' e.g. every week for a month, for a particular cause or organisation that has been approved by the Local Business Meeting. These collections

are from members and attenders and are separate from donations to Quaker funds. The treasurer 'acts as an agent' and at the end of the month the amount collected is immediately passed on to the charity concerned. Most Quaker treasurer spreadsheets have facilities for dealing with special collections, and the treasurer acting as an agent. In this way such donations are not being made from the funds of the Quaker charity.

Conclusion: Recommendation from QSC

We advise that any grant or donation to a non-Quaker charity or organisation made from Quaker funds must be approved and recorded at a Meeting for Worship for Business, and that in the case of donations greater than £250 they should be as a consequence of a tested and adopted concern. A simpler way of making donations to non-Quaker charities and organisations is to use the method of Special Collections.

Sources of help

Local and Area Meetings should consult AM trustees in the first instance if they have any doubts or queries. Quaker Stewardship Committee may be able to give guidance on good practice. The websites of the Charity Commission and OSCR have a number of guidance documents for trustees.

APPENDIX

Extract from the Six Weeks Meeting 2015 Handbook - 4.1.3.9 Hire Charges

There is a legal obligation on trustees to make best use of a charity's assets in support of its objectives. Premises Committees must ensure that this obligation is met in respect of the premises for which they are responsible. Hire charges should therefore be fixed in order to maximise the income received, taking into account local conditions. In principle all hirers, including other charities and groups with whom the meeting is in sympathy, must be charged on the same basis. It should be borne in mind that both commercial organisations and charities have their own sources of income and there is no reason why they should be subsidised by Friends throughout the Six Weeks Meeting pooled funds area. Individual Friends may of course contribute to the funds of such groups as they wish.

However, some flexibility in setting hire charges may be both necessary and desirable. It may sometimes be felt appropriate to charge a lower rate than normal so that a socially useful project with poor funding can use the premises when they would otherwise remain empty.

Additionally an example of a Local Meeting within Six Weeks Meeting that does have a preferential room hire charge arrangement is Kingston-upon-Thames Local Meeting which gives a preferential charge (in fact no charge) for Kingston Peace Council, but this is by a minute of a concern of the Meeting.

Agreed by Quaker Stewardship Committee 9iv18